

PARTING WORDS: FINAL LINES IN SOPHOCLES AND EURIPIDES*

πολλαὶ μορφαὶ τῶν δαιμονίων,
πολλὰ δ' ἀέλπτως κραίνουσι θεοί·
καὶ τὰ δοκηθέντ' οὐκ ἔτελέσθη,
τῶν δ' ἀδοκίμων πόρον ἦῤρε θεός.
τοιόνδ' ἀπέβη τόδε πρᾶγμα.

Many are the shapes divinities take,
much that's unanticipated the gods accomplish;
what we expect goes unfulfilled,
and the god finds a way for the unexpected.
Such was the outcome of this matter.

This passage, which appears without variation at the end of four of Euripides' tragedies and with slight variation in a fifth,¹ is perhaps the most notorious of the brief sequences of lines, usually anapaestic and usually assigned to the chorus, with which nearly all the extant plays of Sophocles and Euripides conclude.² Unlike the more varied final speeches of extant Aeschylean tragedy, which are closely integrated with the play's concluding action, these passages often seem almost detachable from such action, a comment upon or merely after finished business rather than a part of its finishing. In some instances there is general scholarly agreement that the concluding lines are relevant to the action of a play, but many of these passages have been variously dismissed by scholars – as interpolations, as mere dramatic conveniences, or as intentional throwaways.³

Several more examples may remind us why this is so.

* An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Comparative Drama Conference sponsored by the Department of Classics at the University of Florida at Gainesville, March 1985. The work was begun at the Center for Hellenic Studies, which provided me with welcome time, space and library resources in 1983–4. I am grateful to P. E. Easterling and to the referee for helpful comments and suggestions, and to L. A. Kosman for criticism of both style and sense.

I have used A. C. Pearson's Oxford Classical Text of Sophocles (Oxford, 1924), G. Murray's OCT of Euripides (vol. 1, Oxford, 1902 and vol. 3, 2nd ed., Oxford, 1913), and J. Diggle's OCT of Euripides (vol. 2, Oxford, 1981).

¹ This sequence of lines appears at the end of *Alcestis*, *Andromache*, *Helen*, and *Bacchae*; in *Medea* only the first line is different, appearing as 'Zeus in Olympus is steward of many things' (πολλῶν ταμίας Ζεὺς ἐν Ὀλύμπῳ).

² Exceptions to the anapaestic rule are Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* (trochaic tetrameters), Euripides' *Ion* (trochaic tetrameters), and Euripides' *Trojan Women* (lyric iambics). The closing lines of Sophocles' *Trachiniae* are assigned by some MSS to the chorus, by others to Hyllus, and a scholium on *Oedipus Tyrannus* 1523 attributes the last lines of the play to Oedipus.

³ There has been to my knowledge only one attempt at a complete account of all closing lines in Greek tragedy, F. Mayerhoefer's *Über die Schlüsse der erhaltenen griechischen Tragödien* (Diss. Erlangen, 1908). Mayerhoefer begins by discussing some issues of genuineness, notes the increasing standardization of closing lines after Aeschylus, and categorizes the passages as *Bemerkungen ad hoc*, *Sentenzschlüsse*, and *Schematische Schlüsse* (Euripides' repeated endings). He concludes that we cannot expect to find in these endings the *Idee* of the drama. G. Kremer's 'Die Struktur des Tragödienschlusses' (*Die Bauformen der griechischen Tragödie*, ed. W. Jens, Munich, 1971, pp. 117–41) takes almost no account of the place of the concluding lines themselves in the structure of the play's conclusion. An early work by U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *In wie weit befriedigen die Schlüsse der erhaltenen griechischen Trauerspiele*, has recently been edited with introduction and notes by W. M. Calder III (Leiden, 1974). This long essay,

ἡ πολλὰ βροτοῖς ἔστιν ἰδοῦσιν
γνῶναι· πρὶν ἰδεῖν δ' οὐδείς μάντις
τῶν μελλόντων ὅ τι πράξει.

Mortals may know many things
when they have seen them; but before seeing,
no one is prophet of how he'll fare in the future.

(Sophocles, *Ajax* 1418–20)

χωρῶμεν δὴ πάντες ἀολλεῖς,
Νύμφαις ἀλίσαισιν ἐπευξάμενοι
νόστου σωτήρας ἰκέσθαι.

Let us all go together,
praying to the nymphs of the sea
to come as guardians of our return.

(Sophocles, *Philoctetes* 1469–71)

χαίρετε· χαίρειν δ' ὅστις δύναται
καὶ ξυντυχία μὴ τινι κάμνει
θνητῶν εὐδαίμονα πράσσει.

Farewell. The mortal who can fare well
and suffers under no misfortune
lives a happy life.

(Euripides, *Electra* 1357–9)

στείχομεν οἰκτροὶ καὶ πολύκλαυτοι
τὰ μέγιστα φίλων ὀλέσαντες.

We go in wretchedness with loud lament,
having lost the greatest of friends.

(Euripides, *Heracles* 1427–8)

Repetition at the end of more than one play, excessive generality, a triviality that seems inadequate to what precedes – all these features have discouraged a search for significance in what are often called (as if to suggest some vestigial organ) ‘tailpieces’. On the whole, scholars have been less dismissive of Sophoclean than of Euripidean endings, but few would go as far as Bowra, who suggests that the closing words of Sophocles’ tragedies, while not exactly passing a final judgement, serve to put things in the proper key and to tell an understandably confused audience just what impression the author intended it to carry away.⁴ Burton’s remark in his recent book on the chorus is more characteristic of scholarly opinion: ‘...few of these codas in Sophocles and almost none in Euripides are remarkable either for their poetry or their thought’.⁵

In this paper, I will first criticize the assumptions that have led to such dismissal. Then, instead of focusing on the significance of any particular coda for the play which it concludes (as can successfully be done in some instances), I will turn to an investigation of the general significance of these passages for our sense of closural convention in ancient tragedy.⁶

Wilamowitz’s final school paper, is concerned rather with the outcome of the action of plays than with their final lines or scenes. R. Kannicht briefly discusses the genuineness of the Sophoclean and Euripidean endings in his commentary on Euripides’ *Helen* (Heidelberg, 1969) ad 1688–92. For other treatments of the issue of these endings see works cited in notes 4–10, 14, 15, 22 below; a recent dissertation on Euripidean endings by F. Dunn (Yale, 1985) was not yet available as I was completing this essay. I omit here comments on specific endings, except in some instances where these lead to more general remarks.

⁴ C. M. Bowra, *Sophoclean Tragedy* (Oxford, 1944), pp. 9–10.

⁵ R. W. Burton, *The Chorus in Sophocles’ Tragedies* (Oxford, 1980), p. 184. I here adopt his term ‘coda’.

⁶ I take the term ‘closure’ (as applied to the ending of a literary work) from B. H. Smith’s

Some scholars have taken the view that many or most of these passages are later interpolations. No one has been quite so thoroughgoing in this view as F. Ritter, who in his 'Sieben unechte Schlussstellen in den Tragödien des Sophokles' (1861) argues that the codas of all extant Sophoclean plays are spurious,⁷ and in his concluding paragraph promises that he will shortly do the same for Euripides. Recent scholars have been for the most part more discriminating, but Barrett argues that the majority of Euripides' codas are probably spurious, and his comment to this effect on the last lines of *Hippolytus* has remained a standard reference on Euripidean endings.⁸ If Ritter and Barrett were right, we could obviously draw no conclusion at all about the significance of our codas, conventional or otherwise, except as evidence for the taste of a later age.⁹ But what grounds do we have for supposing widespread interpolation?

Both Ritter and Barrett bring linguistic and stylistic arguments to bear. But while it is true that there are occasionally linguistic or metrical difficulties in the codas, most of these difficulties are oddities or obscurities rather than truly intractable problems.¹⁰ Furthermore, each scholar uses linguistic and other particulars only to bolster a rejection based in the first place on a more fundamental general presupposition of spuriousness. The starting point for Ritter's paper is the argument that since it is the characters and not the chorus that open the action of Sophoclean tragedies and bring it to an end, the chorus can have no more to say once the characters have departed.¹¹ Barrett's view is that the Euripidean repetitions indicate interpolation, and that if the repeated codas are thus suspect, all Euripidean endings are provisionally suspect as

Poetic Closure (Chicago and London, 1968), which, like F. Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending* (New York and Oxford, 1966), has been particularly influential in the recent rise of critical interest in problems of closure. Among the articles on ancient literature that acknowledge a debt to Smith are P. H. Schrijvers, 'Comment Terminer une Ode?', *Mnemosyne* 4.26 (1973), 140–59, B. R. Nagle, 'Open-ended Closure in *Aeneid* 2', *CW* 76 (1983), 257–63, M. D. Reeve, 'Tibullus 2.6', *Phoenix* 38 (1984), 235–9, and M. Santirocco, 'The Poetics of Closure: Horace *Odes* III. 17–28', *Ramus* 13 (1984), 74–91.

⁷ *Philologus* 17 (1861), 422–36.

⁸ W. S. Barrett (ed. and comm.), *Euripides' Hippolytos* (Oxford, 1964), commentary ad 1462–6. For a more balanced consideration, see Kannicht's note on *Helen* 1688–92 (op. cit., n. 3 above); cf. also B. R. Rees, 'Euripides, "Medea," 1415–19', *AJP* 82 (1961), 176–81, and H. Lloyd-Jones' review of Barrett's commentary, *JHS* 85 (1965), 171.

⁹ Both Ritter and Barrett envision interpolation at a fairly early date. Ritter (op. cit., n. 7) imagines a post-Euripidean, pre-Alexandrian poet of weak ability who adds the Sophoclean endings for new productions, and Barrett (op. cit., n. 8), less cautious in this respect than Page, holds that 'the most likely culprits [for the repeated Euripidean codas] are the actors', appealing to the taste of a 'public addicted to sententious commonplaces'. The lines that appear in the repeated coda of *Alceste* and the others are found as early as a papyrus of the third century B.C.E. (see Barrett *ad loc.*); references to the codas of plays occasionally appear in the scholia.

¹⁰ R. Dawe, *Studies on the Text of Sophocles*, 1 (Leiden, 1973), pp. 174–5, 203–4, 266–73, has recently given some support to Ritter's doubts on Sophocles' *Ajax* and *Electra*, but the only Sophoclean coda he deletes without hesitation is the widely distrusted conclusion of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, where the awkwardness is particularly pronounced and where there are other difficulties as well (see n. 12 below). Dawe raises the possibility that in this play we have lost the ending referred to by the scholium (see n. 2) and that our ending is quite late (op. cit., pp. 267, 273, and cf. his edition with commentary (Oxford, 1982). Kannicht (op. cit., n. 3), shares Barrett's doubts about style and usage in the codas of *Hippolytus* and *Iphigenia in Tauris*, but see Lloyd-Jones (op. cit., n. 8) for a defence of the coda of *Hippolytus*. The coda of *Iphigenia in Aulis* is rejected by a number of scholars as part of a final scene they consider an interpolation.

¹¹ Ritter, op. cit. (n. 7), 422. He supports this general argument with others which are more particular; perhaps the most noteworthy is that in several cases the final lines are directly addressed to the audience and are therefore suited to comic rather than to tragic choruses (p. 428). For further comments on this claim and on his point about the chorus see pp. 61–3 below.

well. Both scholars thus start from a particular assumption about fifth-century closural convention. But although the virtual interchangeability of some final passages in tragedies and the looseness of connection between these choral codas and the action of the plays may suggest that it would have been easy for substitution and addition to take place,¹² these features can provide grounds for supposing inauthenticity only if we presume a tragic convention that says endings must be closely relevant and not repeated from play to play. And we have no basis for such a presumption.¹³

Finally, even supposing that some of our endings *are* interpolations, there are no grounds for holding, as Barrett does, that the rest are therefore suspect, since an interpolated coda might well be patterned after the genuine article. Unless Ritter's claim of general inauthenticity is correct, then (and no one else has urged so extreme a view), we may in any case be able to draw some conclusions about tragic endings as a type if not about all individual instances in relation to their plays.

A standard view among those scholars who are prepared to grant authenticity to some or most of the endings is that their function is to be found in the staging of tragedy; they assist the chorus's departure from the orchestra by giving it something to say. But this theory is problematic in view of the existence of tragedies in which the chorus does not speak the closing lines (*Agamemnon*, *Prometheus Bound*), and it is subject as well to the standard objection to such functional arguments, that is, that the same end could have been accomplished in some other way:¹⁴ the chorus could have departed in silence, or during words spoken by characters, or with a musical accompaniment alone.

It is still harder to take seriously Hermann's notion that the concluding lines of tragedy were sometimes deliberately banal because the playwrights knew that their last words would be lost amidst the sound of the audience's preparations for

¹² It is clear, of course, that the final lines of tragedies, especially where those lines are loosely connected with the preceding action, would have been easily tampered with, and there is some evidence that points to such tampering, although even D. L. Page calls it 'confessedly meagre' (*Actors' Interpolations in Greek Tragedy* [Oxford, 1934], p. 95). Page accepts two such pieces of evidence as 'perhaps traces of a common practice' of transference of lines, not necessarily by actors. (1) The closing lines of *Oedipus Tyrannus* bear a close resemblance to *Phoenissae* 1758–63 (lines immediately preceding the coda), and many have taken this resemblance to suggest interpolation in one or both plays. (2) In two MSS of *Hippolytus*, we find added to the usual ending the lines that conclude *Phoenissae*, *Orestes*, and *Iphigenia in Tauris* (see Barrett's apparatus *ad* 1466a–c).

The first piece of evidence suggests that we should be wary of assuming that we know the endings of *Oedipus Tyrannus* or *Phoenissae* (whose entire closing scene is problematic); but if the similar lines belonged originally to *either* play, they can still tell us something about the characteristics of fifth-century endings. And although the second piece of evidence may support the widespread view that Euripides' repeated codas were sometimes added to plays to which they did not originally belong, we need not assume that the coda in question was not Euripides'. (See p. 57 for discussion of a very different type of interpolation, one that is unmistakably an addition to the text without any possibility of being a displaced but genuine coda.)

¹³ There is clear evidence for the use of formulaic closing lines in Menander's comedies; see E. W. Handley's note on 968ff. in his edition with commentary of the *Dyscolus* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965). Given Barrett's reaction to Euripidean repetition, it is worth noting Handley's comment on the presence of such lines at the ends of several of Menander's plays and of something very similar in another playwright: '... although we do not know that [Menander] invented the formula, the fact that he uses it repeatedly suggests so'.

¹⁴ Cf. Barrett's criticism of the staging argument (*op. cit.*, n. 8); see also Rees (*op. cit.*, n. 8), who argues that the use of the codas to accompany the departure of the chorus need not rid them of all interpretive significance, and suggests a parallel with liturgical practice at the end of an Anglican church service, where recessional hymn and organ voluntary are 'not to be regarded as a mere device or stopgap...' (p. 178).

departure.¹⁵ This argument demands that we envision an author who deliberately writes something intended not to be heard. We might be inclined to accept a weaker version of the argument – namely, that authors do not put what is most important where it will not be heard –, but even this claim makes problems for those endings that *do* seem worth hearing. Either version of the argument poses in any case a kind of chicken–egg problem; an audience does not start rustling programmes and shuffling feet when it expects there is still something of interest to catch.¹⁶

The view that a repeated or loosely connected coda is interpolated, the view that it has a merely theatrical function, and the view that it is a deliberate throwaway have in common the presumption that a coda either contributes to the meaning of a particular play or is essentially meaningless. In the most recent general discussion of Sophocles' endings, Hester offers a different perspective; he seeks a middle ground, suggesting that these endings are neither clues to the meaning of the play nor completely meaningless, but rather examples of a convention of final diminuendo, of ending plays with familiar moral sentiments intended to relax the audience.¹⁷ While Hester recognizes that the conventional, even when it approaches the banal, is not necessarily spurious or lacking in all significance, he is not willing to give the same consideration to Euripides as to Sophocles, and describes the younger poet as raising the tag to a 'pitch of meaningfulness'.¹⁸ Furthermore, although his reading of Sophocles' codas grants them a certain integrity, it is finally a more limiting and dismissive reading than it need be. My aim here is to suggest the direction for a further discussion of the nature and effect of the convention Hester and others rightly perceive in the codas.

¹⁵ G. Hermann, ed. and comm., Euripides' *Bacchae* (Leipzig, 1823) ad 1383. Hermann's comment is so often referred to that it should perhaps be quoted in full: 'Qui factum sit, ut Euripides quinque fabulas iisdem versibus finierit, non memini me a quoquam interpretum indicatum legisse. Scilicet, ut fit in theatris, ubi actorum partes ad finem deductae essent, tantus erat surgentium atque abeuntium strepitus, ut quae chorus in exitu fabulae recitare solebat, vix exaudiri possent. Eo factum, ut illis chori versibus parum curae impenderetur.' Hermann is speaking specifically of the repeated codas here. The comment on *Oedipus Tyrannus* 1524–30 in his edition (Leipzig, 1833) is evidence enough that he did not consider all codas negligible: 'Perinepta est scholiastae ad praecedentem versum adnotatio: καὶ αὐτάρκως ἔχει τὸ δράμα. τὰ γὰρ ἐξῆς ἀνοίκεια, γνωμολογούντος τοῦ Οἰδίποδος. Nam fine careret fabula, nisi aut chorus aut Oedipus aliquid adiceret, ut quo tenderent ista omnia, quae in scena acta sunt, intelligeretur.' Rees, op. cit. (n. 8), 178, asks why the audience should be departing at all before the end of a trilogy. We do not know how long an interval there was between plays, or between trilogy and satyr play, but it seems improbable that the audience departed *en masse* after each play (although the often-cited *Birds* 785–92, which offers the audience the prospect of a quick flight home from the theatre during the tragedies, does suggest a certain restlessness).

¹⁶ There is a modern example of what might be called the deliberately insignificant close: the portion of a film, usually still but sometimes in motion, that serves as background for the final credits. Most film-goers rise and make their way out as soon as the credits appear (Rees, op. cit. (n. 8), 178, notes the resemblance to Hermann's imagined audience) and cinema-owners reinforce this behaviour and the attitude it entails by bringing up the lights and opening the doors (to the irritation of the dedicated). But the film that continues behind the credits is not a true analogue to our codas, since what is shown is normally only a pictorial backdrop to information that comments not on the action itself but on the mimesis. Furthermore, if it should come to be more common to show a surprise bit of interesting action while the credits roll, as some recent film-makers have done, audiences will presumably become more attentive, and film-makers will begin to count on this attentiveness.

¹⁷ D. A. Hester, 'Very Much the Safest Plan, or Last Words in Sophocles', *Antichthon* 7 (1973), 8–13. W. B. Stanford cites without reference a similar view of the conventional endings 'as a deliberate device for easing the transition of the audience's mind from the world of the play back to real life' in his commentary on *Ajax* (London and New York, 1963), ad 1418–20.

¹⁸ Op. cit. (n. 17), 9.

I have questioned the assumption that a lack of particular significance means a lack of any significance. There is a deeper assumption also at work in critical discussions of the coda. The majority of scholars agree that we should not look to the coda as the last word on the meaning of a play; but the fact that this shared opinion is so often put as a *negative* ('these passages do not have great significance') suggests an underlying feeling, occasionally made explicit, that what is in a literal sense the last word ought to have special force.¹⁹ Recent critical work on closure in literature suggests a reason for this feeling. It is that we expect to experience the end of a work not only as the place where the work stops and loose ends are tied up but as the point at which we look back and make the final revision of our interpretation.²⁰ It is hard, then, not to feel that the last words of a tragedy ought to give us a final bright transformative glimpse of meaning, and we are disappointed when those words seem lacking in significance.

But such disappointment involves a misapprehension about the role of the last *words* in the ending of a play. Since drama, to use Aristotelian terms, consists not only of words but of plot, character, thought, diction, song, and spectacle, our sense of the ending in tragedy is clearly the product of the closing scene as a whole. And if we hold with Aristotle that plot – the structure of events – is the very soul of tragedy,²¹ then it is the outcome of the story, the working out of the narrative, that is the most important aspect of the ending. We should indeed look at the closing lines as part of a complex closural strategy, but only as part.

It may be objected that even if the end is a composite, the last line is still the *end* of the end, and that we can all remember the theatrical experience of a stunning final line, a speech that remains and resonates in the mind when the play is over. But we need to consider the difference between the curtained and the curtainless stage. This difference is often cited in connection with the view (mentioned above) that on the curtainless Greek stage the departure of the chorus had to be covered by closing lines.²² A more significant result of the difference in staging is this: in the modern theatre blackout or dropped curtain identifies the end as the end, creating a kind of frozen moment with a frozen final speech, but in the Greek or Elizabethan theatre the end must be self-identifying in action and words, with the result that we are more aware of the process of ending, and of the last lines as a partial marker of that process.²³ In a play by Shaw, for example, the fall of the curtain reveals that the end is the end and the last words are last; it thus gives these last words, by its apparent arbitrariness, the weight we associate with a person's dying words, cut off by death. But in a play by Sophocles, it is the last words themselves which reveal that the end is the end and that they are the last words; they thus resemble the ritualized words of a priest at a death-bed. When Goethe says 'More light' and dies, death tells us that these are his last words, and gives them a special significance. When the priest speaks the words of the last sacrament, his words already have a significance: they tell us that we are witnessing a death.

¹⁹ Cf. Bowra, *op. cit.* (n. 4), p. 9, and Hester, *op. cit.* (n. 17), 9.

²⁰ See for example Smith, *op. cit.* (n. 6), pp. 10–14, 36–7, 119, 212, 218, on what she calls 'retrospective patterning'.

²¹ Aristotle, *Poetics* 6, 1450a38–9.

²² Cf. for example E. R. Dodds's commentary on Euripides' *Bacchae* (2nd ed., Oxford, 1960) ad 1388–92: 'A modern producer would bring down the curtain on 1387, but a Greek dramatist had to get his Chorus out of the orchestra.'

²³ The idea of process is important here. The coda is not as abrupt as the curtain, and the lines that precede the coda also as a rule contain indications of the approaching end (see pp. 58–9, 61 below).

The coda in Greek tragedy, then, is less magically significant than the closing words of a modern drama, but it plays a role that is dignified if predictable: by its familiar form and content it marks the end all plays must have. In what follows I will support the view that the use of the coda constitutes a closural convention with both an integrity and an interest of its own, arguing first that the codas are recognizable as such, and then that they exhibit certain typical features that have a particular appropriateness to their closural function.

It should first be noted that in spite of the variety among the codas and the scholarly disagreement over their genuineness, we derive from them a shared sense of the range of possibility for the form and content of a coda. That this is so is suggested by two phenomena.

(1) In manuscripts N and O of Sophocles' *Ajax*, we read after the closing anapaests the following two iambic lines:

ὁ κλεινὸς Αἴας τῶν Ἀχιλλείων ὄπλων
χόλῳ βαρυνθεὶς Ἑκτορος θνήσκει ξίφει.

The illustrious Ajax, because of Achilles' arms
burdened with anger, dies by Hector's sword.²⁴

No one has ever argued that this is the true coda. What makes these lines so transparent an interpolation as to go unmentioned by most editors is not only that it is easy to see how such a descriptive couplet could have been added in the course of transmission. It is also that there is no extant example in tragedy of an iambic conclusion (though they are to be found in satyr plays), and, what is much more important, that there is no example of such a summary descriptive move in a conclusion.²⁵ Indeed, we would be very surprised to find one, since such a summary seems to belong in the prologue, if anywhere, or perhaps in the speech of a *deus ex machina*, referring not to the events of the play but to the mythical future. Here then is a set of closing lines in the manuscript tradition of an extant play that is obviously inappropriate as a coda, although perfectly applicable to that play.

(2) On the other hand, we can recognize among the fragments of tragedy lines that have the obvious earmarks of a coda, although they make no specific comment on the play to which they belong. It is easy, for example, to see that the following lines from Sophocles' lost *Tereus* are almost certainly, as scholars have noted, the closing lines of that play:

θνητὴν δὲ φύσιν χρὴ θνητὰ φρονεῖν,
τοῦτο κατειδὼτας ὥς οὐκ ἔστιν
πλὴν Διὸς οὐδείς τῶν μελλόντων
ταμίας ὅ τι χρὴ τετελέσθαι.

²⁴ Dawe, *op. cit.* (n. 9), 1, p. 118 and 2, p. 50, notes the presence of this couplet (constructed in part from *Ajax* 41) in N and O; it is followed in O by two unmetrical lines. M. Haslam discusses it in his article 'O Suitably-Attired-in-Leather-Boots: Interpolations in Greek Tragedy', in G. W. Bowersock, W. Burkert, and M. C. J. Putnam, eds., *Arktouros: Hellenic Studies Presented to Bernard M. W. Knox* (Berlin, 1979), pp. 91–100.

²⁵ There are of course passages that *refer* to the preceding action at the ends of tragedies, but only one of these (*Cho.* 1065ff.) really approaches a summary, and it is clearly a descriptive comment on recent events by someone involved in them, whereas the lines in question here sound like the words of a narrator. See R. J. Tarrant's commentary on Seneca's *Agamemnon* (Cambridge, 1976) *ad* 1006ff.; it is interesting that in the summary passage Tarrant is discussing, Cassandra is declaring her eagerness to narrate recent events to the Trojans who have died before her.

Mortal natures must think mortal thoughts,
 well aware of this, that there cannot be
 anyone but Zeus who is the steward
 of what's to be fulfilled in the future.²⁶

The metre is an appropriate metre, and the sentiment is clearly related to the sentiments of Euripides' repeated conclusion and of the conclusions of Sophocles' *Ajax* and *Antigone*.²⁷

It is clear, then, that there are features of the codas that identify them as such. There are also features which, without exactly serving as identifying marks, are recognizable as typical features of the conventional coda. Codas may be said either to look to the immediate future, to set a kind of seal on the past, or to make timeless generalizations. Of those that look to the future, many contain simple statements of intention to depart or farewell greetings; command, prayer, and wish – future-directed modes of speech – are also common. Codas that set a seal on the past do so either by including brief lamentation or by placing an emphasis on the finality or authority of what has happened. Finally, timeless generalization is to be found in a number of codas containing gnomic statements, and these statements are concerned either with the inexorable and unforeseeable nature of events or with what is of value in human life (virtue, good sense, good fortune, friends).²⁸

Notice that these features not only occur regularly in the choral codas themselves, but are also frequently found in the lines immediately preceding them.²⁹ This fact (to which I shall return) is not surprising, for the central features of the codas are features we naturally associate with ending (in life or literature), and thus would expect to find as a work is drawing to its close. The codas, in other words, have a conventional status

²⁶ Fr. 590 in A. C. Pearson, *The Fragments of Sophocles*, 2 (Cambridge, 1917) and S. Radt, *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, 4 (Göttingen, 1977). The first line as here given is Grotius' emendation for the unmetrical *θνητὰ φρονεῖν χρή θνητὴν φύσιν*.

²⁷ The form and content of Nauck 446 suggest that it too is the coda of the play to which it belongs, Euripides' earlier *Hippolytus*:

ὦ μάκαρ, οἷας ἔλαχες τιμᾶς,
 Ἰππόλυθ' ἦρως, διὰ σωφροσύνην
 οὔποτε θνητοῖς
 ἀρετῆς ἄλλη δύναμις μείζων·
 ἦλθε γὰρ ἢ πρόσθ' ἢ μετόπισθεν
 τῆς εὐσεβίας χάρις ἐσθλή.

²⁸ I do not mean that the features cited here belong to mutually exclusive categories of coda; they are often combined. Farewells or references to departure (in which the verb *στείχω* is particularly common) are to be found in Sophocles' *Trachiniae* and *Philoctetes* and in Euripides' *Hecuba*, *Heraclidae*, *Suppliants*, *Trojan Women*, *Heracles*, *Electra*, *Ion*, *Iphigenia in Aulis* and *Rhesus*; commands, prayers or wishes in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, *Philoctetes* and *Oedipus at Colonus* and in Euripides' *Heraclidae*, *Hecuba*, *Trojan Women*, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, *Phoenissae*, *Orestes* and *Rhesus*. Lamentations occur in Euripides' *Hippolytus*, *Heracles* and *Trojan Women*, and emphasis on finality, authority, or necessity in Sophocles' *Trachiniae* and *Oedipus at Colonus* and in Euripides' *Hecuba*. Gnomic statements are to be found in the codas of Sophocles' *Ajax*, *Antigone*, *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Tereus*, in the shared conclusion of Euripides' *Alcestis*, *Medea*, *Andromache*, *Helen* and *Bacchae*, and in his *Hippolytus*, his lost earlier *Hippolytus*, *Electra* and *Ion*.

²⁹ Interestingly, some of these elements are also prominent, combined with certain formal features of endings, in what critics have described as false or premature endings – for example, in *Antigone*'s anapaests at *Antigone* 937–42 and in the tetrameter exchange between Neoptolemus and Philoctetes at *Philoctetes* 1402–8. On the *Antigone*, see Kremer, op. cit. (n. 3), p. 132; for a discussion, with examples, of 'false endings' in general, see O. Taplin, *Stagecraft in Aeschylus* (Oxford, 1977), pp. 180–4, 327. (Smith, op. cit. (n. 6), p. 212, uses the term 'false closure' in a different sense.)

as indicators of the end, but their characteristic features give them a natural status as clausal gestures.³⁰

The very relation of the codas to the passage of time is in keeping with their clausal function. When an action or a conversation is coming to an end,³¹ concluding words can assist finality by pointing to what is past as past, by dealing with and so containing the immediate future, or by withdrawing from the passage of time into timelessness.

When we look at the contents of the codas, a natural association with ending is perhaps most obvious in statements of finality or authority, such as are to be found in the codas of *Electra* or *Oedipus at Colonus*. Mentions of departure or farewells are also an intuitively apt mode of conclusion, and this is not merely because the chorus's departure within the story neatly coincides with its departure, as a chorus, from the stage. There are many non-dramatic works, ancient and modern, in which the end is signalled by a departure; consider, for example, Socrates' and Aristodemus' departure at the end of Plato's *Symposium*, or the departure to fresh woods and pastures new at the end of Milton's *Lycidas*, or the end of *Paradise Lost*, in which Milton may be said to show the prototype of all endings – and beginnings – as a departure. The brief lamentations in our codas point to the act of lamentation, which, like other rituals, signals a punctuation of our lives, and is often so used at the ends of dramas and other works of literature – think of the *Iliad*, *Persians*, *Seven Against Thebes*, and of the many orders for funerals that conclude Shakespearean tragedies.³²

But what of the gnomic codas? It is these that have most troubled scholars and exercised their ingenuity, since it is these that seem at once to offer final meaning and to withhold it.³³ If they do not sum up for us what has preceded (and most readers agree that they do not), how do these codas contribute to closure? They do so primarily, I think, by marking a boundary between the story and the larger world of discourse in two complementary ways. On the one hand, the gnomic coda presents a view simpler than the complexities the story has given rise to; on the other hand, whereas the story is particular, the coda claims universality. All gnomic expressions, thus, when set in the context of a story, suggest both their own inadequacy and the inevitable selectivity of any story.

The very inadequacy of a gnomic coda may sometimes be said to contribute to closure. When a play's complexities suggest infinite possibilities for its extension, the

³⁰ In the discussion that follows I am especially indebted to Smith's fourth chapter ('Special Terminal Features') particularly the sections 'Closural Allusions', 'Unqualified Assertion', and 'The Poetic Coda' (op. cit. (n. 6), pp. 172–95.) Smith's subject is closure in lyric, not in narrative, and although she occasionally notes parallels, she stresses the difference between the two literary types: 'Whereas the structure of a play or novel is related to the structure of events, the structure of a lyric poem is related to that of personal discourse...' (p. 122). In the codas of our tragedies, however, we are clearly dealing not so much with the end of the action, since the structure of events is already complete, as with the end of the play on the level of speech, and we might therefore expect the presence of devices like those Smith mentions.

³¹ On informal conversational closure, see Smith (op. cit. (n. 6), p. 187).

³² For a brief comment on the relation between convention and significance in the references to funerals that end Shakespearean tragedies, see R. Brower's introduction to the Signet edition of *Coriolanus* (New York, 1966). On our need to punctuate our lives with indications of endings, see especially Kermode (op. cit., n. 6), *passim*.

³³ The difficulty we have with the gnomic is of course not confined to the endings of works, nor to the Greek theatre. A memorable attempt to cope with the presence of gnomic utterances may be seen in Ingmar Bergman's film of Mozart's *Magic Flute*. Whenever a piece of proverbial wisdom appears in a song, the director has his characters hold up large signs with the words calligraphically inscribed – thus, I take it, making sure the audience will see these sayings as analogous to mottos on samplers or shields, and not confuse them with 'the meaning of the action'. See also n. 36 below.

end must put a stop to these, and the coda, obviously over-simplifying, points to the necessity of finality – and perhaps to its limits as well. The coda of Sophocles' *Antigone* evidently comments on the tragic result of Creon's failure in good sense and reverence, thus suggesting a completed tale of wrong-doing punished, but Antigone's action and suffering (harder by far to accept or make sense of) are left untouched. At the end of Euripides' *Electra*, we overhear a horrifying act of revenge, witness the remorse and sorrow of the avengers, and listen to the lengthy and inadequate explanations and arrangements of the *deus ex machina*; the chorus then concludes this enactment of the story of the house of Atreus (a story that traditionally evades conclusion) with what is surely the emptiest, if truest, of all gnomic endings: those who fare well are fortunate.

The selectivity of the story is especially emphasized in such codas as the famous and much maligned Euripidean coda with which I began, since its reference to the outcome of 'this matter' (τόδε πᾶγμα) points to the possible existence of other matters. Here too there may also be a suggestion not only of finality but of the limits of finality, since (as Burnett has noted) the changefulness to which the coda points may mean that no end is really permanent.³⁴

It is not only the gnomic endings which, by the relation of content to context, both contribute to finality and point to its limits. Even simple departure is a departure to some further event, and the audience is often well aware what that event will be; when at the end of *Trojan Women*, for example, the chorus members tell each other to go to the ships of the Achaeans, their final word (Ἀχαιῶν) recalls the dreadful plans made by the gods in the opening scene for the returning Greeks. Two of the most emphatically final codas in tragedy, that of Sophocles' *Electra* and that of his *Oedipus at Colonus* (which refer respectively to fulfilment and to authority), conclude scenes in which it has been subtly suggested that there is more suffering to come.³⁵

The choral coda thus constitutes the marker of the end of a tragedy. But it is important to note that although under one description the end is that part of a drama which nothing else follows, under another description the end of a drama is a boundary that both limits the world of the drama and separates it from other worlds. Because we recognize the coda as marking the end, we are aware as it is spoken that the chorus is leaving the stage (and its role) and thus crossing the boundary between the world of the play and the world of the audience. At the same time the coda marks other boundaries: the boundary between the story of the play and the larger world of discourse (marked especially by the timeless gnomic codas) and the boundary between the story of the play and the continuing story of the myth (marked especially by those codas which seal the past or contain the future). The content of the codas reflects their role in marking the boundary or limit of the action. But what marks a boundary also invokes what is beyond it or outside it, and in their use of codas Sophocles and Euripides sometimes play with this possibility as well.

³⁴ A. P. Burnett, *Catastrophe Survived* (Oxford, 1971), p. 4. Burnett is not here speaking specifically of the codas, but in arguing that the playwrights worked in various ways against 'the excessive unity of the discrete tragedy' she remarks that they 'would from time to time dwell expressly on the theme of the whirl of fate, as if to remind us that the rigid finale to come was only an illusion'. The 'whirl of fate' is in fact a frequent theme in the conclusion itself.

³⁵ See *Electra* 1497–1500, *Oedipus at Colonus* 1769–72. On such Sophoclean allusions and their force, see, in addition to the commentators, P. E. Easterling, 'Philoctetes and Modern Criticism', *JCS* 6 (1981), 39, O. Taplin, 'Sophocles in his Theatre', *Sophocle, Entretiens Hardt* 29 (Geneva, 1983), 155–74, and R. W. Winnington-Ingram, *Sophocles: An Interpretation* (Cambridge, 1980), esp. p. 302 and n. 70. I have dealt with the subject at some length in another paper, 'Sophoclean Endings: Another Story', forthcoming in *Arethusa*.

Analogues to much of what I have been saying about Greek tragedy are to be found in Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre. I have mentioned the curtainless stage common to both and the parallel between Shakespeare's final funerals and certain Aeschylean finales; we may also note that many plays by Shakespeare and others end with speeches marked formally by a final rhyming couplet (also used to mark ends of scenes and acts), sometimes referring to departure or lamentation, often containing a gnomic expression.

So, call the field to rest, and let's away
To part the glories of this happy day.

(Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*)

Let earth and heaven his timeless death deplore
For both their worths will equal him no more.

(Marlowe, *Tamburlaine* Part II)

The counsels of the gods are never known,
Till men can call th'effects of them their own.

(Ford, *The Broken Heart*)

Integrity of life is fame's best friend,
Which nobly, beyond death, shall crown the end.

(Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*)

Those who doubt that Sophocles and Euripides could have written the lines we find in their codas would do well to recall some of the couplets of these later playwrights.³⁶

Before concluding, I want to address two questions my discussion has raised.³⁷ First, given that the closural features I have cited tend to appear not only in the choral codas of Greek tragedy but in the lines which precede them and are spoken by the characters, even if everything I have said here about the closural nature of the codas is true, they could still be claimed to be otiose in many plays. Why then do we so consistently find tragedies ending with these codas, and why is it always, or almost always, the chorus that speaks them?

The second part of this question suggests an answer to the first: these codas are present in order that the chorus may speak at the end. But why should this be so? A traditional view (see p. 54 above) is simply that the chorus should not have to depart in silence. But another line of thought seems to lead in a more interesting direction. Perhaps what is important is not that the chorus *speak* at the end, rather than remaining silent, but that the *chorus* speak at the end, rather than someone else. At the end of five of Aeschylus' extant plays (*Persians*, *Seven Against Thebes*, *Suppliants*, *Choephoroi*, and *Eumenides*) the chorus speaks the final words; these words are well motivated within the drama, as are the processions which make so apt a finale in four of the plays in question.³⁸ When we turn from Aeschylus to Sophocles and Euripides

³⁶ Critics' difficulties with Webster's general use of gnomic material or *sententiae* seem to be analogous to the difficulties of Classical scholars with the gnomic endings of tragedy. R. Berry, *The Art of John Webster* (Oxford, 1972), cites Ian Jack, 'The Case of John Webster', *Scrutiny* 16 (1949), 39: '...this background of moral doctrine has nothing to do with the action of the plays: so far from growing out of the action, it has all the marks of having been *superimposed by the poet in a cooler, less creative mood* than that in which the Duchess and Flaminio had their birth. There is no correspondence between the axioms and the life presented in the drama. This dissociation is the fundamental flaw in Webster [*italics mine*].' Note that the material in question is being treated as a kind of interpolation by the author himself. Berry's defence of the artistry of Webster's use of *sententiae* (see esp. pp. 28–31, 77–78) includes an interesting comparison with the Greek chorus.

³⁷ Note the marker of the approaching end of this paper.

³⁸ Even if the ending of *Seven Against Thebes* as we have it is not by Aeschylus, it is more

we find the role of the chorus in general diminished, and the action proper of their plays nearly always ends with an exchange between characters, or a comment by one. The fact that these plays none the less always (or almost always) end with the chorus may then reflect the development of a convention that in a sense fossilizes and regularizes the prominent concluding role the chorus often (but not always) has in Aeschylus, giving the chorus the last word even when the last word is no longer strongly motivated.³⁹

But why should this particular feature of Aeschylean tragedy be retained? The reason, I think, is that even when the chorus has no specific fitness to end a particular play, it has a general fitness to endings. The chorus is a kind of boundary figure within the play, in that it is observer and participant at once, teller of stories parallel to the story of the play, and retailer *par excellence* of gnomic wisdom. It is appropriate, then, that it should also be the last speaker at the boundary that is the ending of the play.

The second question is this. If these codas point to the fact of ending, to the boundary between the play and the world outside it, and to the boundary between the story and its continuation, are they, as some have claimed, self-referential and in some sense illusion-breaking?⁴⁰ In most instances, not quite. The codas do not explicitly identify stage as stage, play as play, chorus as chorus; though by their function as marker they approach such self-referentiality, what they say generally has some possible if limited motivation within the drama. They are hardly, as Ritter argues, clear instances of the sort of direct audience address found in comic choruses.⁴¹

than probable that the play ended with the words of the chorus, since the proposed excisions either exclude Antigone and Ismene altogether or reduce them to minor voices. The chorus that speaks last in *Eumenides* is not the chorus of Erinyes that has been present throughout, but this secondary chorus of celebrants does accompany (in both senses) the original chorus in its departure. On Aeschylus' final processions see Taplin, *op. cit.* (n. 29), pp. 127–8, 411–15. The standard choral anapaests of later tragedy replicate these processions in miniature.

³⁹ The observable facts about the chorus's role in tragic endings have been explained (or explained away) differently by others. Ritter, as noted above, *op. cit.* (n. 7), 422, argues that the diminished role of the chorus in Sophocles and Euripides, particularly in prologue and exodus, means that their plays should not (and in fact do not) end with the chorus. Mayerhoefer (*op. cit.* (n. 3), pp. 43–5) takes the opposite point of view: in trying to explain why the use of choral endings becomes the rule as time goes on he argues that because the chorus as a general rule is more detached from the action in Sophocles and Euripides than in Aeschylus, it is particularly well suited to conclude the play. He thus sees (as I do) a particular appropriateness in the use of choral endings, although he sees it as deriving not from Aeschylean practice but from a move away from that practice. But his view (based largely on the *Agamemnon*) that choruses should only have the last word when they have not just previously been strongly involved is hard to support given the end of *Suppliants* (or indeed of *Persians*).

⁴⁰ There are well-known difficulties with the term 'dramatic illusion'; D. Bain makes careful note of them in the first chapter of his book *Actors and Audience: a Study of Asides and Related Conventions in Greek Drama* (Oxford, 1977), pp. 1–12. We are not of course to assume that the usual audience is really under any serious illusion as to the reality of the events portrayed on stage, but Bain suggests that we may continue to use the term 'illusion' if we are conscious of its limitations. As he puts it elsewhere, 'All that I mean when I say that an actor preserves the illusion is that he pretends to be a character other than himself and that his pretence is accepted by the audience' ('Audience Address in Greek Tragedy', *CQ* 25 [1975], 1). Bain, like Taplin (*op. cit.* (n. 29), esp. pp. 129–34, 394–5), holds that there is no real rupture of the illusion, so described, anywhere in Greek tragedy. Both scholars do note the existence of some features approximating such a rupture (see, for example, Bain [1975], p. 22 and Taplin, p. 133), but deny these any significant effect; the limitation of their treatment is thus its insensitivity to the possible effects of different degrees and kinds of dramatic self-referentiality. No one would claim that fifth-century tragedy does what fifth-century comedy does, but given that in general tragedy firmly maintains its own boundaries, Euripides' occasional forays are of particular interest.

⁴¹ *Op. cit.* (n. 7), 428.

There is, however, one Euripidean coda which I have not yet quoted that is widely supposed to break the dramatic illusion;⁴² it is the coda that ends *Orestes*, *Phoenissae*, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, and in some manuscripts *Hippolytus* as well:

ὦ μέγα σεμνή Νίκη, τὸν ἐμὸν
βίοτον κατέχοις
καὶ μὴ λήγῃς στεφανοῦσα.

Great holy victory, stay with me in my life,
and do not cease to crown me.

Prayer is not uncommon in the codas, and there is an example in tragedy of a final appeal to victory that is motivated within the drama: at the end of *Rhesus*, the Trojan chorus departs for battle as commanded by Hector, and prays for victory as it does so.⁴³ In the repeated prayer, however (especially given the wretched outcome of the events of *Phoenissae*), it is hard to see the appeal as anything but a reference to the wished-for outcome of the dramatic contest in which the chorus is participating.

Given that it is exceptional, should we then assume that at least this coda is a later addition? Not necessarily. There is nothing strange in a gradual move in tragedy to an obviously self-referential conclusion such as we find in comedy. A parallel development may be seen in English drama. In the Elizabethan period, epilogues sometimes asked that the audience approve the play, and by Dryden's time the epilogue was a fully-developed, almost self-contained piece of poetry, which could indeed be written by one poet for the play of another. We cannot say with any assurance that this coda is not Euripides' own, given the poet's special affinity for comedy and his frequent hints at self-referentiality. Granted that these lines are more obvious (and less motivated by the action) than Euripides' usual reminders that we are watching a play, it should still be remembered that *Orestes* and *Phoenissae* at least are not only late but arguably his most self-conscious works in the complexity and frequency of their allusions to earlier versions of the stories they present.⁴⁴

In any case, my argument here is not that all our extant endings are genuine, but that they should not be automatically suspect or automatically despised. Given the ease with which endings of texts may be lost or changed in transmission, caution is justified; but we should also be cautious in our assumptions about a closural convention so far removed from our own time. We see in Greek tragedy a move from final lines strongly motivated within the drama to endings that are clearly conventional, almost formulaic, and even verging on the self-referential. But this move should not be assumed to be a move from the authentic to the inauthentic, from the relevant to the irrelevant, or from the significant to the meaningless. Rather, in all their transform-

⁴² Bain [1975] (op. cit. (n. 40), p. 22) grants partial recognition to this effect.

⁴³ The closing lines of the *Rhesus* are:

πείθου βασιλεῖ· στείχωμεν ὅπλοις
κοσμησάμενοι καὶ ζυμμαχία
τάδε φράζωμεν· τάχα δ' ἂν νίκην
δοίῃ δαίμων ὁ μεθ' ἡμῶν.

Compare Aristophanes' *Acharnians*, which ends with a victory song which is also motivated within the story.

⁴⁴ On the *Orestes* see esp. F. Zeitlin, 'The Closet of Masks: Role-Playing and Myth-making in the *Orestes* of Euripides', *Ramus* 9 (1980), 51-77; on *Phoenissae*, H. Foley, *Ritual Irony: Poetry and Sacrifice in Euripides* (Ithaca and London, 1985), pp. 106-46. On Euripides' general tendency to sophisticated play with what his audience knows or expects, cf. also Winnington-Ingram, 'Euripides: Poietes Sophos', *Arethusa* 2 (1969), 127-42.

ations the final lines of tragedy may be seen as part of a closural strategy, with significance both for our experience of the end as an end and for our recognition of its limitations.

I conclude with a standard scholarly coda, suitable for any paper, but guaranteed not to be an interpolation:

Many scholars have had something to say on this matter,
and they have taken many different approaches.
I may not have touched on everything relevant,
but I hope I have added something new to our thinking.
Such was the intent of this paper.

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APPENDIX

We lack evidence for closural convention in early Roman tragedy, but the endings of Seneca's tragedies differ in several respects from those of extant Greek tragedy. Only two of the surviving plays, *Hercules Oetaeus* and *Octavia*, conclude with choral anapaests. (Although in both cases Senecan authorship has been questioned, we may still see their endings as evidence for Roman if not for Senecan practice.) The remaining seven (the *Phoenissae* lacks an ending) conclude with iambic lines spoken by a character; in all but one play (*Troades*, where a messenger speaks), this is a character of some importance, and in three plays (*Agamemnon*, *Hercules Furens*, *Thyestes*) the ending is part of an ongoing dialogue. The final words are unquestionably apt and often striking, especially in *Agamemnon*, *Oedipus*, *Thyestes*, and *Medea*.⁴⁵

At the same time, the endings of these plays reveal some of the features naturally appropriate to closure which are characteristic of the endings of Greek tragedy: mention of departure, declaration of future course, command, lamentation, prayer. What is by and large absent from Senecan tragedy, then, is any more formal indication of ending. The fact that dialogue may continue to the very end, and that neither a change in speaker nor a change in metre seems regularly to mark that end, may be in part a function of different performance conditions. If, as some scholars think, Seneca's plays were designed for recitation or private reading rather than for enactment,⁴⁶ a formal marker of the conclusion within the play could be more easily dispensed with, and the possibilities of a certain abruptness could be explored.

It is interesting in this connection that the two plays that most give the impression of ending in mid-dialogue were both provided with long epilogue speeches by sixteenth-century translators (*Thyestes* by Jasper Heywood and *Agamemnon* by John Studley).

⁴⁵ On *Medea* see T. S. Eliot, 'Seneca in Elizabethan Translation', *Selected Essays* (New York, 1932, 2nd ed. 1950), p. 73, cited by C. D. N. Costa in his commentary on Seneca's *Medea* (Oxford, 1973), *ad loc.*

⁴⁶ For a brief account of the debate, with recent bibliography, see E. Fantham's introduction to her edition with translation and commentary of *Troades*. She draws primarily on O. Zweierlein's defence of the recitation theory in *Die Rezitationsdramen Senecas* (Meisenheim am Glan, 1966), but her own final conclusion is that 'only the readers would experience the plays as complete works' (p. 48).